

## **Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Chairman of the Committee on Information (26 April 2004)**

First of all, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor, and through him to the Department of Public Information, for the excellent cooperation extended to me, and to the members of the Bureau of the Committee on Information during the past year.

Presiding over this committee for the second year, I am comforted by the knowledge that the Department is led by someone who is not only known for his prodigious qualities but also for his unwavering commitment to the ideals of the United Nations as the embodiment of our common hope and collective goodwill. This Committee looks forward to working with you, Mr. Tharoor, and with your Department, to further effect the transformation that has already brought about its renewal. I am also comforted by the fact we continue to be supported by our Secretary Madam Therese Gastout. She has been a marvellous source of support, not just to me, though also that, but to the entire Committee.

The close working relationship between DPI and the Committee forged at the time of the twenty-fifth session has continued throughout the year. A good example of this rapport was my participation, at DPI's invitation, in the World Electronic Media Forum in December 2003 in Geneva. The overall objective of this parallel event organized by DPI at the time of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society was to engage the media as stakeholders in the information society and to emphasise the principle of freedom of opinion and expression, and their corollary, press freedom. I was also deeply gratified to be able to represent the Committee at the first phase of this important meeting on the information society.

As you know, as Chairman of the Second Committee, I wear a second hat. I do see a lot of complementarities between the two Committees, especially in terms of prioritization and focus. At the last COI, as well as at the Second Committee, we devoted a lot of time discussing the crisis in Iraq and its implications. While the situation today is not radically different from that of last year, we definitely need to look beyond Iraq. Indeed, Iraq continues to remain on top of the global agenda but there are other issues that also need to be addressed. The Secretary-General has often drawn our attention to some of the more pressing and more immediate threats facing the vast majority of the world's population: threats of extreme poverty and hunger, unsafe drinking water, environmental degradation and endemic or infectious diseases. These challenges are collectively addressed in the 2000 Millennium Declaration. I hope that at this session of the COI, we will have more time to focus on the Millennium Development Goals, which provide us with precise and time-bound targets to address those challenges.

The observance next year of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations will provide us with an opportunity to take stock of what the Organization has done and how the Member States have helped to accomplish its goals. If you ask me, no matter which yardstick one applies, the achievements of the Organization during these past six decades have been monumental.

Ask the people in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala or Mozambique about the UN, and I am sure they would say "thank you, United Nations" for bringing peace to their lands. Ask the people of South Africa and they would say "thank you, United Nations" for helping to end apartheid; ask millions of refugees and internally displaced people around the world, and they would say "thank you United Nations" for giving them shelter. To millions of people affected by poverty, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases, the United Nations remains the best hope — often the only hope — for survival and for a better future.

Of course, the United Nations has not solved all problems the world faces. But if we want to see them solved — including such problems as the turmoil in the Middle East, the question of Palestine, the problems concerning Cyprus and in West Africa, to name a few — we need the UN more than ever before.

The observance of the sixtieth anniversary will be an occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the ideals of the United Nations. It must also be an occasion for energizing the global public opinion about the evolving role of the world body. The anniversary will not be truly meaningful unless the people of the world come to know about it and become part of this observance. Our Committee should reflect on this and provide policy guidelines to the Department of Public Information so that it takes the lead in promoting this observance in every way possible.

Now a few more words about this year's session which, I believe, will be important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it will provide us with an opportunity to review the state of UN reform as it affects DPI. In the past two years, major changes have taken place in the Department. There have been both structural and operational overhauls. The report on the continuing reorientation of the Department gives us some clear yardsticks to measure the success of these changes, and I look forward to the statement of the Under-Secretary-General on the latest status of the reform measures put in place, including regionalization of the network of United Nations information centres. This and five other reports, which were circulated well in advance, provide a good and clear picture of the changes brought about under the Secretary-General's reform process. I am glad to note that in preparing the reports, the Department of Public Information has taken advantage of the guidelines it was given by our Committee in the area of public information. I know that you have carefully examined these reports, submitted to us for our consideration and that they will shape the general debate.

I would also like to draw your attention to the Note by the Secretary-General on the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2006-2007. This strategic framework will replace the current four-year medium-term plan. This important document, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 58/269, provides an overall orientation of DPI and includes the proposed biennial programme plan for the biennium 2006-2007. This is the key to our understanding of what the four sub-programmes of the Department expect to accomplish and what indicators of achievement they will use during this period. As you will recall, General Assembly resolution 52/220 stressed the role of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, such as our Committee, in the consideration of the narrative of the proposed programme budget. It

is therefore important that we carefully consider the note and convey our views to the General Assembly.

Needless to say that our objective at this year's session, as usual, will be to adopt a consensus document at the end of our two-week deliberations. With the changed format, we now have more time for negotiations over the draft resolution. We should take advantage of this arrangement and focus on our overarching objective: to collectively provide the best possible policy guidance to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Tharoor, so that our Organization continues to benefit from the strong voice given to it by .

As your Chairman, I promise to do my part. I am sure you will do yours.

Thank you.